Qurʾānic Spell-ing: Disconnected Letter Series in Islamic Talismans[1]

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Abstract This article is intended to supplement Tawfiq Canaan's 1937 review "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," which was republished in 2004. It draws on both medieval and modern material for illustration, and contains some novel suggestions as to how certain magical formulae may have evolved from Qurʾānic templates. The focus of the paper is on series of Arabic letters where the characters have been written in their "isolated" or "disconnected" forms; the most popular of these privileged letter series turn out to have colorful Qurʾānic origins or associations which are not well served by existing commentaries in English. The survey commences with the nineteen-letter *basmalla* and then addresses the fourteen Letters of Light, including the full-length Name of the Mysteries and two five-letter "crowning words" from the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letter-sequences of the Qurʾān. It moves on to the seven letters of the lower darkness, the *sawāqiṭ*. Subsequently, it examines the seven Letters of Bahteh from the *al-qādirat* and the seven component letters of the Qurʾānic phrase "strong, severe." Finally, it reviews the seven-letter strings that comprise the seven *ṭahaṭīl* names, and the eighth name that is their acronym. Many of the letter series presented in this paper feature in the work of the Egyptian magician Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), who sought to deflect suspicions of demonolatry or polytheism by grounding his magical practices in the Qurʾān and in the letters making up particular Qurʾānic verses. With the significance of those letters amplified by the use of disconnected writing, the resulting paradigm has remained prominent in the books and talismans of Islamic magic from the thirteenth century CE through to the present day.

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[1] The reviewers acting for *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* (Penn Press) both recommended publication of this article, but the editors felt that it was too specialized for their journal, which has to date not carried any papers on Arabic magic. Subsequently, the section editor for Islam at the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* agreed with his (new) reviewers that the paper was of particular interest and should see print, but declined it on the basis that it did not meet the exacting standards of *JAOS*. I am grateful to the three editors and four reviewers for their expert feedback and helpful suggestions. Lacking suitable alternatives at this stage, I have decided simply to make the paper freely available online. Article © L.D. Graham, 2011; v15_12.02.15.

To Western eyes, written Islamic talismans are at once beautiful and baffling objects. Usually inscribed on paper, they contain pious supplications in Arabic to God (or his intercessors) for help and protection. These prayers are usually augmented by relevant verses from the Qurʾān and by invocations that rely on some of the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names of God" (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) or on other names, as well as by arcane symbols whose origins may, in some cases, lie in Hebrew or in old south Arabian alphabets. Examples of the talismanic practices of medieval and even modern times can be found in the works of the Egyptian magician Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), to whom is attributed the encyclopedic grimoire known as the *Shams al-Maʿārif* (The Sun of Gnosis).[2] Edgar Francis' recent analysis of the Islamic magic taught by al-Būnī has provided a wider context for the belief in, and practice of, the operations of talismanic magic, including some aspects of letter-magic.[3]

In his extensive survey "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," Tawfiq Canaan (Tawfīq Kanʿān) divides the writings on Arabic amulets into four categories:[4]

(1) Texts of continuous intelligible sentences (often quotations from the Qurʾān and other holy scriptures);
(2) Single words, whether meaningful or apparently meaningless (including names of God, angels, prophets, companions of Muḥammad, or jinn; and mystical words, often borrowed from foreign languages);
(3) Letters and numbers (written in straight lines, cartouches, or matrices); and

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[2] Jan Just Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and his Work," in *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture*, eds. A. Vrolijk & J.P. Hogendijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183-199.

[3] Edgar W. Francis IV, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad ibn Ali al Buni (d. 622/1225)* (Los Angeles: PhD Dissertation, Univ. California Los Angeles, 2005), 134-181.

[4] Tewfik Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 125-177. This paper is a reprinting of the original article, which first appeared (in two instalments) as *Berytus Archaeological Studies* 4 (1937): 69-110 and 5 (1938): 141-151. Canaan's collection of Palestinian amulets is housed by Birzeit University, Palestine, and has a virtual gallery online at http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/tour/ethno/coll-cat?id=01 (accessed Feb 13, 2011).

(4) Symbols, graphic signs, or figures (the *lunette sigla*, *charaktères* or *brillenbuchstaben* forming one recurring category of symbols, and the Seven Seals forming another;[5] besides which one may find drawings of Zodiac signs, animals, the *khamsa* or Hand of Fāṭima, the Dome of the Rock, the Kaʿba, the sword of ʿAlī, and so on).

Even those able to read Arabic will find that talismans pose special challenges to comprehension.[6] While light has been shed on numerous issues by Canaan's review, many mysteries still remain. The present paper focuses on part of the third category listed above, i.e. on letters; more specifically, it deals with series of letters where the characters have been written in their "isolated" or "disconnected" forms rather than in the cursive script that would normally be used to write complete words.

Canaan points out that disconnected letters are often used to write words of special importance in Arabic magical documents; he explains that this invokes fully the intrinsic power of each letter, and thereby maximizes the potency of the charm.[7] In simple examples, standard invocations such as the *basmalla* are spelled out using isolated letters (Fig. 1).[8] The letters of select words or phrases may also be presented in the cells of a magic square, where their numerical values contribute to the mathematics, or in the

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[5] Emilie Savage-Smith, "Introduction - Magic and Divination in Early Islam," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), xiii-xlxi, at xxii-xxv; *CHARAKTER - An International Seminary on Magical Signs in Antiquity*, 24th September 2010, ELTE University, Budapest; online at http://ookor.blogspot.com/2010/09/charakter-international-seminary-on.html (accessed Feb 14, 2011).

[6] In the words of Canaan, a Palestinian physician fluent in Arabic, "A student engaged in deciphering magic formulae is encountered on every step of his journey with difficulties. […] But nowhere can the reader find real data to help him understand the writings, which are at times very intricate."

[7] Canaan, "Decipherment," 152.

[8] William B. Stevenson, "Some Specimens of Moslem Charms," In: *Studia Semitica et Orientalia*, ed. Glasgow University Oriental Society (Glasgow: MacLehose, Jackson & Co., 1920), 84-114, at 103; Canaan, "Decipherment," 130; Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 159 and 231.

cells of a Latin square,[9] where a regular displacement of the series from row to row builds up an aesthetically pleasing and magically potent pattern.[10]

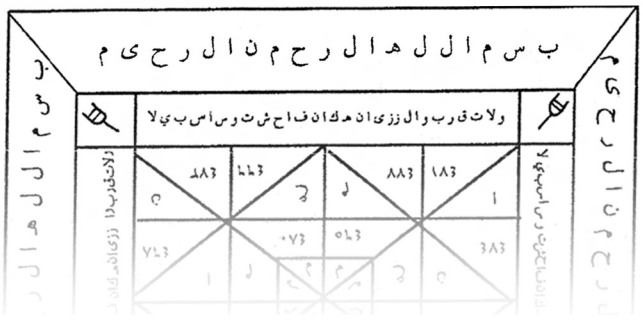

Fig. 1. Detail of a talisman with *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* ("In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful") spelled in isolated Arabic letters around its outer perimeter. From the Persian *Kanz al-Khavāṣṣ, Kanz al-Yahūd* (Treasury of Magic Properties, Treasury of the Jews) by Mullā ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Kīlānī (1205/1790).

Beyond this, however, we also find recurring sets of separate or disconnected letters (*al-ḥurūf al-mutafarriqa*)[11] which do not spell out Arabic words or phrases, and whose meaning is not immediately apparent. These too can be presented in linear fashion or worked into a the matrix of a square. For instance, ب د و ح ("*budūḥ*") is a mathematically constructed "word" whose letters provide the numerical sequence 2-4-6-8, and whose alleged power has more or less earned it the status of a Divine name.[12]

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[9] This term will be used to denote non-mathematical letter-, text- and symbol-based squares, even if the pattern does not comply with the requirement for each character to feature just once in each column and row.

[10] Entry "*Wafk*," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. [hereafter "EI2"], ed. Peri Bearman *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2005); Tewfik Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls," *J. Palestine Oriental Soc.* 16 (1936):79-127, at 89-90; Canaan, "Decipherment," 156-166.

[11] Canaan "Arabic Magic Bowls," 89.

[12] Entry "*Budūḥ*," EI2; Frances Harrison and Nineveh Shadrach, *Magic That Works – Practical Training for the Children of Light* (Vancouver: Ishtar, 2005), 46; Nineveh Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity Through Occult Powers of the Alphabet* (Vancouver: Ishtar, 2006), 13-25 and 43-47; Canaan, "Decipherment," 148; Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 146-47.

While this example is too well known to require further discussion, other series of disconnected letters that recur conspicuously in magical documents are less widely appreciated. The most popular "privileged letter series" turn out to have colorful Qurʾānic origins or associations. Since these constitute an aspect of talismanic letter-magic that is not well served by commentaries in English, they form the subject of the present communication.

The Letters of Light and the Name of the Mysteries

The *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) are unique letters or letter sequences that appear at the start of twenty-nine suras of the Qurʾān, the so-called "Mother Suras." The fourteen component letters comprise exactly half of the Arabic alphabet. These are the "Letters of Light" (*al-ḥurūf al-nūrāniyya*)[13] which, in a tradition attributed to Muḥammad, al-Būnī describes as "the root of all that is in the word, seen and unseen."[14] Henry Corbin considers them to represent the "hidden Spirit."[15] The verbal noun *muqaṭṭaʿa* translates literally as "cut." Although members of this group are often referred to as the "disconnected" or "isolated" letters, and the rule when reciting the Qurʾān is to pronounce the letters separately,[16] the appearance of more than one letter at the start of a sura is often presented in written Qurʾāns as a "crowning word"[17] formed from joined letters. *Sura al-Shūra* is unique in commencing with two such words. Each letter of the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* begins one of the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names of God," but nine of the letters are thought to be superior to the others, as they also correspond with the Seven

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[13] Unrelated to the *ḥurūf shamsiyya* or "sun letters." Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, *ca*. 1972), trans. as *In Iranian Islam*, vol. 2, Hugo M. van Woerkom, 2003 (online at http://www.scribd.com/doc/9664772/Henry-Corbins-In-Iranian-Islam-Vol2, v1.0, accessed 14 June, 2010), 49; Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 46.

[14] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 161.

[15] Henry Corbin, *In Iranian Islam*, vol. 2, 49.

[16] Canaan, "Decipherment," 151.

[17] Canaan, "Decipherment," 150.

Heavens, the divine Seat and the Throne.[18] Shiʿa commentators identify the fourteen *muqaṭṭaʿāt* with the *maʿsūmūn* or Fourteen Infallibles, i.e. Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima, and the Twelve Imams.[19] Some commentators believe that the "crowning words" come from the heavenly language of God, while others believe that they themselves are Divine names.[20]

For magical purposes, the complete set of *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters appears to take the form of the series ا ه م س ق ك ح ل ع ي ص ط ر ن, the "Name of the Mysteries" or "Secret Name of Light,"[21] although this represents their order neither in the alphabet nor in the Qurʾān. In talismans, the last three letters may be omitted (Fig. 2a) and the ل may be repositioned or absent (Fig. 2b). This suggests that the full sequence originated in the conjunction of two "crowning words," which over time underwent phonetically similar letter substitutions and slight rearrangements that may have been intended to aid vocalization. Specifically, the first five letters (ا ه م س ق) are likely to derive from the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters at the start of *Sura al-Shūra* (ح م ع س ق), with the original *ḥmʿsq* mutating into *ʾhmsq*.[22] If one omits the ل from the next six letters (ك ح ل ع ي ص), following the example of Fig. 2b, the remaining sequence bears a strong resemblance to the letter series commencing *Sura Maryam* (ك ه ي ع ص), meaning that the Qurʾānic *khyʿṣ* has become modified to *kḥʿyṣ*. The original versions of these two "crowning words" play important roles in their own right, as discussed in the next section. The idea that the Name of the Mysteries was pronounced, either silently or out loud, is consistent with the teaching of modern practitioners, who – aiming at an Anglophone audience – encourage aspiring magi to vibrate it as "Ah-am Sa-qak Hha-la-aʿa Ya-ss Tah-ren."[23] The suggestion that individual letters can be substituted by phonetic equivalents is supported

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[18] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 161.

[19] Henry Corbin, *In Iranian Islam*, vol. 2, 49.

[20] Canaan, "Decipherment," 150; Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 46.

[21] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 46

[22] Here *ʾalif* has been transliterated by its original value, ʾ.

[23] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 46

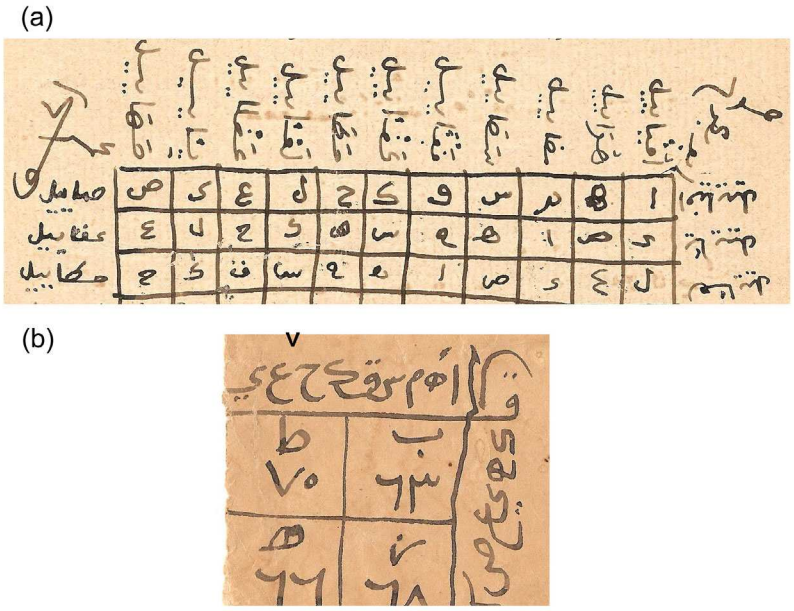

Fig. 2. Talismans with near-complete forms of the Name of the Mysteries. **(a)** Top three rows of an 11 x 11 Latin square in which the first 11 letters of the Name are sequentially displaced two cells to the left. From a manuscript fragment (*ca*. 1900) describing the calculation of the Greatest Name of God. **(b)** Detail of a fragment from an undated talisman showing the first 10 letters of the Name along the top, with the exception of ل , whose rightful position is marked with for this figure with a "v" symbol. A lacuna at left means that any letters beyond ي have been lost. The "crowning word" *kḥʿyṣ* is written vertically at right, and is continued downward by cursive text (not shown).

by the fact that Saqak appears in some manuscripts as Sakaq,[24] and indeed the replacement of ق with ك in the derivatives of "crowning words" appears to be common in talismans (see ahead to Fig. 3d).

al-Būnī teaches that inscription of the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters on the bezel of a ring will ensure a rapid delivery during childbirth. The same talisman, or even the mere recitation of the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters, will cure an epileptic who is enduring a seizure.[25] Modern teaching presents the Name of the Mysteries as "a secret and guarded Divine name…

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[24] *Ibid*.

[25] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 177

[which], in part or in whole, is used to connect the magician with the Elemental currents" of Spirit, Fire, Air, Water and Earth.[26]

The Crowning Words *khyʿṣ* and *ḥmʿsq*

Canaan mentions that in talismans the "crowning words" from the suras of the Qurʾān are often placed at the end of invocations, and that their letters are often used to construct Latin squares and seal designs.[27] Two of the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letter-series that we have already met above, namely ك ه ي ع ص from *Sura Maryam* and ح م ع س ق from *Sura al-Shūra*, appear frequently in talismans.[28] They are most often concatenated into a single string of isolated letters which transliterates as *khyʿṣḥmʿsq* (Fig. 3a, periphery; Fig. 3b), although they can co-appear as separate strings (Fig. 3c). Either series can also appear on its own (Fig. 2b, vertical text; Fig. 3a centre, Fig. 3d); for example, a translation of the Solomonic treatise known as *Kitab al-ʾAjnās* contains three instances of the *Sura Maryam* letters and five of the *Sura al-Shūra* ones.[29] In al-Būnī's work, the component letters also feature, collectively or separately, in Latin squares,[30] and a whole chapter of the *Shams al-Maʿārif* is devoted to the *Sura Maryam* series.[31] Fig. 3d is unusual in that the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters from *Sura al-Shūra* have been interpolated into a linear presentation of the "Seven

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[26] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 46.

[27] Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls," 104; Canaan, "Decipherment," 151.

[28] Rudolf Kriss & Hubert Kriss-Heinrich, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam*, vol. 2: *Amulette, Zauberformeln und Beschwörungen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962), 84 & 96; Stevenson, "Some Specimens of Moslem Charms," 97-8.

[29] Pseudo-ʾĀṣif bin Barkhiyā, *Kitab al-ʾAjnās*, attrib. Asaph ben Berechiah and trans. as *The Grand Key of Solomon the King*, Nineveh Shadrach (Vancouver: Ishtar, 2009). The *Sura Maryam* letters appear on p.118-9 and 144, and the *Sura al-Shūra* ones on p.54 , 118-9, 144 and 180. In the source text the Arabic letters are joined, and (as mentioned previously in respect of Qurʾāns) the *Sura al-Shūra* series is presented as two "words," حم عسق .

[30] Aḥmad al-Būnī, *Shams al-Maʿārif al-Kubrā*, "al-Ḥusaynī" lithograph/printed edition (Cairo: Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣubayḥ wa-ʾAwlāduh, 1345-7/1927-8), Book 2, 58-9.

[31] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 161

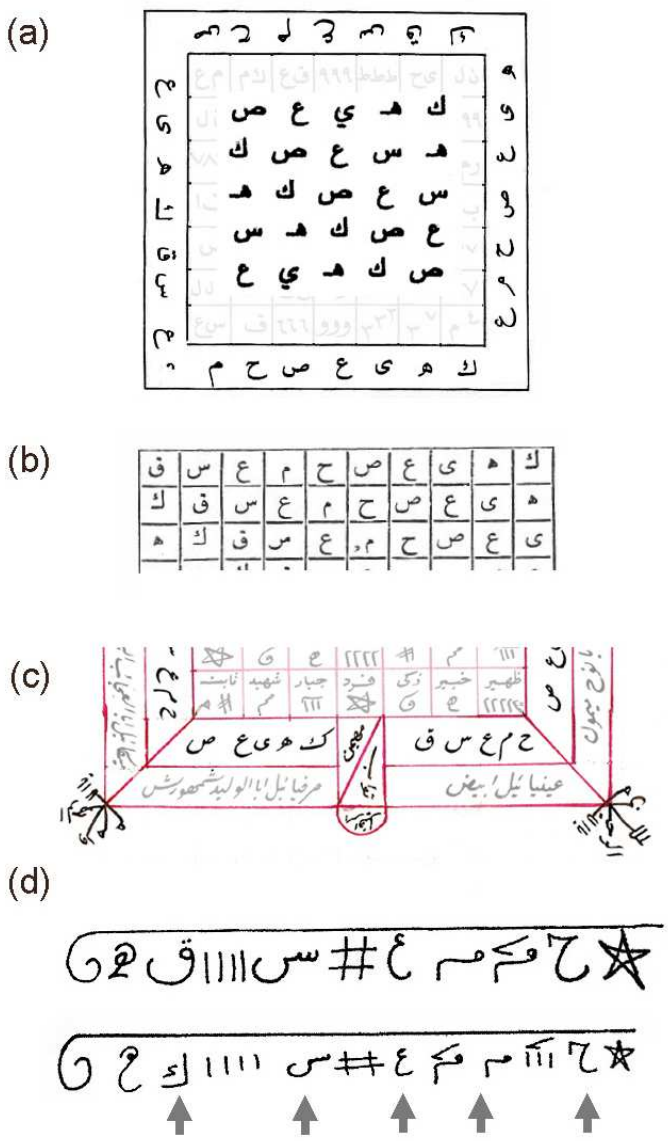

Fig. 3. Talismans with "crowning words" *khyṣ* and/or *ḥmʿsq*. **(a)** Composite from a "ghostbuster" talisman,[32] with the two words in tandem repeat around the periphery. For this figure, the (irrelevant) central table has been obscured and overlaid with a Latin square from al-Būnī's *Siḥr al-ʿIshāq* (Love Magic) which features just the first word. **(b)** Top three rows of a 10 x 10 Latin square from al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif*, in which the letters of the two words in tandem are sequentially displaced one cell to the right. **(c)** Detail from an Ottoman Turkish talisman (*ca*. 1307/1890) based on the Seven Seals, where the two words co-appear separately in repeats around the second periphery. The contrast has been adjusted to downplay much of the irrelevant content. **(d)** The second word, interpolated into the Seven Seals; for clarity, its letters have been arrowed. Source as for Fig. 1. The second Seal is missing from the first series. Note the phonetically equivalent substitution of the final letter; of the four Seal/letter hybrid series in the source text, the substitute letter features in three and the authentic letter in just one.

[32] Online Malaysian free talisman site; URL withheld as the site harbors infectious malware.

Seals," the graphic form of the Greatest Name of God.[33] Normally, as we shall see later, these symbols are associated with the letters of the seven *sawāqiṭ*.

Canaan mentions a talismanic design in which each letter of ك ه ي ع ص was represented by a "Beautiful Name," specifically *al-kāfī* (The All-Sufficient), *al-hādī* (The Guide), *al-bārī* (The Originator), *al-ʿalīm* (The Omniscient), *al-sādiq* (The Truthful).[34] In a more sophisticated scheme, the *Khazīnat al-ʾAsrār* (Treasury of Secrets) of Sheikh Muḥammad Ḥaqqī al-Nāzilī[35] (nineteenth century CE) identifies Qurʾānic verses, or segments within them, that commence with the *Sura Maryam* letters and terminate with the *Sura al-Shūra* ones. Thus, ك (first *Maryam* letter) begins a segment in Sura 18:45 that ends with a ح (first *al-Shūra* letter); ه (second from *Maryam*) begins Sura 59:22, which ends with a م (second from *al-Shūra*); ي (*Maryam*) begins a segment in Sura 40:18, which ends with a ع (*al-Shūra*); ع (*Maryam*) begins Sura 81:14-18, which ends with a س (*al-Shūra*); and ص (*Maryam*) begins (as a *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letter) Sura 38:1-2, which ends with a ق (*al-Shūra*). The Qurʾānic sequence therefore reads "…as water that we send down from the sky to produce plants of the earth, then they turn into hay that is blown away by the wind. / He is the One God; there is no other god beside Him. Knower of all secrets and declarations. He is the Most Gracious, Most Merciful. / … the imminent day, when the hearts will be terrified, and many will be remorseful. The transgressors will have no friend nor an intercessor to be obeyed. / Every soul will know everything it brought. I solemnly swear by the galaxies, precisely running in their orbits; by the night

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[33] Hans A. Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der Mohammedanischen Zauberei* (Graz, Austria: Geheimes Wissen, 2006), 76-195; Georges C. Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme de Dieu (*Ism Allāh al-Aʿẓam*)," in *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici: Ravello, 1-6 Settembre 1966*, 7-58 (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1967); Canaan, "Decipherment," 169-71.

[34] Canaan, "Decipherment," 151. The word *bārī* does not commence with the requisite letter, *yāʾ*, but this anomaly is easily overlooked as Canaan prefaces all of the names with the vocative يا (*ya-*, "O").

[35] The *Khazīnat al-ʾAsrār* of Sheikh Muḥammad Ḥaqqī al-Nāzilī concludes with a mention that the author was briefed by Ibrāhīm al-Saqqā in the year 1286/1869. A version of the book was printed in 1414/1993 by Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya (Beirut).

as it falls, and the morn as it breathes. / (*Ṣād*), and the Qurʾān that contains the proof. Those who disbelieve have plunged into arrogance and defiance."[36]

The Seven *Sawāqiṭ*

We now leave behind the letters of light, and turn to their antithesis. The "seven *sawāqiṭ*" (ف ج ش ث ظ خ ز) are the seven consonants that do not appear in the *fātiḥa*, the opening sura of the Qurʾān.[37] The Arabic term indicates that these letters are "fallen ones" which are "worthless"[38] on account of their omission from the powerful sura that serves as the foundation stone of the Qurʾān;[39] the same word, when applied to people, carries the pejorative meaning of "scum."[40] Of the fourteen Letters of Darkness, the seven *sawāqiṭ* constitute those of the lower world (*al-sufliyya*), and are thus the most potent in sowing enmity and hatred.[41] Canaan gives them in joined letters as two "words" which transliterate as *fi<u>sh</u> <u>th</u>ẓ<u>kh</u>z*.[42]

The story goes that, in the mid-ninth century CE, the Byzantine emperor[43] wrote a letter to al-Mutawakkil, the last great ruler of the Abbasid Caliphate. The emperor wrote: "I have heard that there is a chapter of a divinely revealed book which does not contain the letters [here, members of the *sawāqiṭ*] and if this chapter is recited it grants the reciter paradise. I would like to know which chapter and in which book, and why these letters

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[36] Text from *The Qurʾān - An Authorized English Version*, translated from the original by Dr. Rashad Khalifa, PhD. Online at http://www.submission.org/Q-T.html , accessed 11 July, 2010. Some small revision of punctuation was required.

[37] Canaan, "Decipherment," 130, 148 and 155.

[38] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, 94 fn.

[39] Canaan, "Decipherment," 130.

[40] Martijn T. Houtsma, *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*, vol. 9 (Leiden:Brill, 1987), 227.

[41] Canaan, "Decipherment," 154-5.

[42] Canaan, "Decipherment," 148. A correction has been made to give the correct final letter, ز, which in Canaan's paper is misprinted as ر. Where transliteration required the use of two Roman letters to represent a single Arabic one, the pair have been underlined.

[43] Presumably Michael III, of the Phrygian Dynasty.

are not present." al-Mutawakkil was keeping Imam al-Hādī (ʿAlī an-Naqī, *ca*. 212/827-254/868), the tenth of the Twelve Shiʿa Imams, under virtual house-arrest in his capital, Samarra (in Iraq). But the scholars of al-Mutawakkil's court were confounded by the emperor's question, so eventually al-Mutawakkil turned reluctantly to Imam al-Hādī. The imam told al-Mutawakkil that the chapter was *Sura al-Fātiḥa* in the Qurʾān, and that the above letters were not present because it was a chapter of mercy and each of the *sawāqiṭ* represents a word of Allāh's anger or punishment.[44] al-Mutawakkil asked the imam what the seven letters represented. The imam answered: "The character ث refers to destruction (ثبور, *thubūr*), the ج is a reference to Hell-fire (جحيم , *jaḥīm*), the خ a reference to foulness or depravity (خبث, *khubth*) or to loss (خسر, *khusr*).[45] The ز stands for the *zaqqūm* tree (زقوم), which grows in Hell and bears poisonous fruit shaped like devil's heads (Sura 37:62-68), the ش refers to misery (شقاوة, *shaqāwa*), the ظ is a reference to darkness (ظلمة, *ẓulma*), while the ف indicates damage (آفة, *āfa*) or misfortunes in general (الافات, *al-āfāt*)."[46] al-Mutawakkil sent the imam's information to the emperor, who was so pleased with the answer that he allegedly converted to Islam.[47]

The *sawāqiṭ* often accompany the Seven Seal symbols in a 7 x 7 table of correspondences.[48,49] The sequence shown at the start of this section is the most usual (Fig. 4a), although one of the oldest versions of al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif* presents the letters in the sequence خ ث ظ ز ش ج ف ,[50] and a further permuted version of this sequence (with

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[44] Faez Karimi, online at http://www.jafariyanews.com/articles/2k3/3sep_naqi(as).htm; also http://www.ziaraat.org/naqi.php. Accessed 1 August, 2010.

[45] The last assignment is the version given in http://www.ziaraat.org/naqi.php.

[46] The last assignment is the version given by Canaan, "Decipherment," 130. For all the words, the relevant *sawāqiṭ* provides the initial consonant.

[47] Online at http://vb3.nghmat.com/n5034/; accessed 1 August, 2010.

[48] E.g., Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme de Dieu ," 25.

[49] Since each of the *sawāqiṭ* is thereby associated with a different planet, each planet can be represented by a 7 x 7 square containing just the *sawāqiṭ* and commencing with the appropriate letter in the top-right-hand cell (Canaan, "Decipherment," 165; Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 163). However, modern practitioners are more likely to use the Seal symbols than the *sawāqiṭ* for this purpose (Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 243-74).

[50] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, 91-3.

the ج and خ transposed) features in copies of Sheikh al-Manzrī's eighteenth-century CE work, *Kashf al-ʾAsrār al-Makhfiyya* (Unveiling the Hidden Secrets) (Fig. 4b). When not accompanying the Seals, yet other sequences are found, with the likelihood of permutations increasing towards the end of the series. When partnered with the Seals, each of the *sawāqiṭ* is typically accompanied by one of the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names of God," for which it provides the initial letter (Fig. 4). Thus, for the mainstream series,

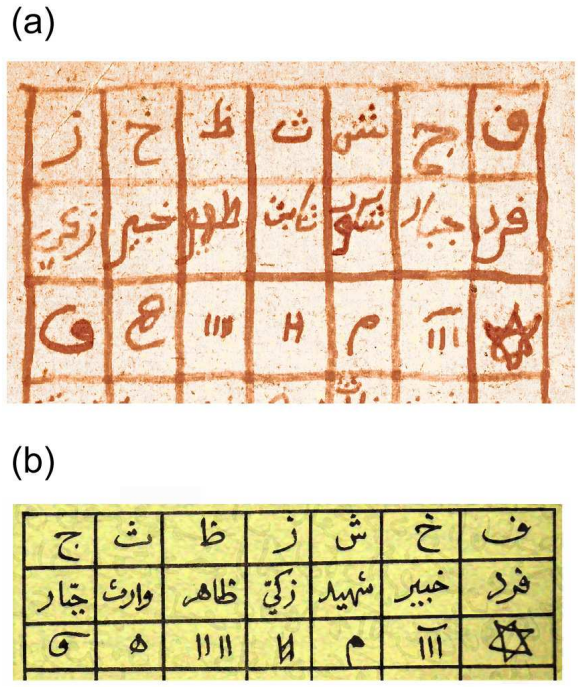

Fig. 4. The seven *sawāqiṭ* in 7 x 7 tables of correspondence with the Seven Seals. **(a)** Top three rows from a table in an unidentified mid-19th century CE manuscript leaf, showing the standard letter series in the top row. **(b)** Top three rows from a table in a 19th century CE manuscript copy of Sheikh ʿUmar ibn Masʿūd al-Manzrī's *Kashf al-ʾAsrār al-Makhfiyya*, showing a sequence close to that in one of the oldest extant copies of al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif* (Cod. Par. 2647, 13th century CE). For both panels, the word underneath each *sawāqiṭ* is the cognate "Beautiful Name of God."

we have *al-fard* (The Singular), *al-jabbār* (The Compeller), *al-shahīd* (The Witness), *al-thābit* (The Stable), *al-ẓahīr* (The Visible), *al-khabīr* (The Proficient), and *al-zakī* (The

Pure).[51] It is interesting to see that the *sawāqiṭ* serve a dual purpose with opposing functions. On the one hand, they are worthless letters that signify the evil of the lowest darkness; al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif* focuses exclusively on their harmful power, explaining how they can be used to punish and inflict pain.[52] On the other hand, the *sawāqiṭ* also represent a series of Divine names that for the most part do not have connotations of anger or punishment, and each letter corresponds with a symbol in the Greatest Name of God.

The Letters of Bahteh and the *al-qādirat*

Another sequence of isolated letters commonly encountered in Islamic talismans appears as follows: ف ق ج م خ م ت (Fig. 5). If the letters are joined, as is often the case in explanatory texts, then the first three and last four traditionally form separate "words" which transliterate as *fqj mkhmt*.[53] Canaan, who calls the series the "Letters of Bahteh" on the authority of Buṭrus al-Bustānī,[54] devotes just three sentences to them. He mentions that writing the letters on a petition or envelope ensures that the enclosed wish will be granted, and that the letters, which are believed to be lucky, often feature in 7 x 7 Latin squares (Fig. 5b).[55] Sheikh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib bin al-Bashīr[56] (born 1155/1742) is more

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[51] Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme de Dieu ," 27; Canaan, "Decipherment," 155.

[52] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 164.

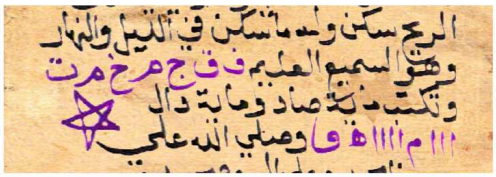
[53] Where transliteration required the use of two Roman letters to represent a single Arabic one, the pair have been underlined.

[54] Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif* (Compendium of Knowledge): *Encyclopedie Arabe*, VII, 6 ff. (Beirut: 1883). This was the last volume of the encyclopedia completed before the death of its founder, the Lebanese polymath al-Bustānī, whereupon others stepped forward to continue his monumental work. Albert H. Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 164.

[55] Canaan, "Decipherment," 148.

[56] Sheikh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib bin al-Bashīr of Oum Marhi, founder of the Sudanese al-Samania (al-Samānī) Sufi school (http://fatimaabdulmahmoud.com/cv2.html; http://www.khatmiya.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-385.html) ,was born in 1155/1742 and died in 1239/1824 according to the preface of his book. He studied in both the Sudan and the Hejaz (western

(a)



(b)

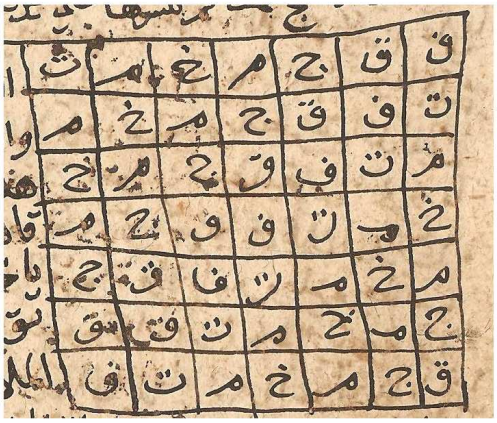


Fig. 5. The Letters of Bahteh from the *al-qādirat*. **(a)** The Letters (in purple, second line) are followed by six of the Seven Seals (also in purple, third and fourth lines). From an undated copy of *Mujarrabāt al-Dayrabī*, whose author died in 1151/1738. **(b)** A 7 x 7 Latin square of the Letters. From an 18th century CE copy of what is believed to be a *rūḥānī* work by Sheikh ʾAbū al-Qāsim al-Samsamī, composed in Algeria.

forthcoming on their significance in his book *Sirr al-ʾAsrār* (The Secret of Secrets), in which he explains that they are the initial letters of catchwords in seven Qurʾānic verses. Together, these verses form a family called the *al-qādirat* on the basis that each of them ends with the word *qādir*, which means "able" or "potent" in the sense of the Divine name

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Saudi Arabia), remaining in the latter for more than seven years, and also visited Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Jerusalem (http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9). He established the al-Samania order in Sudan in 1206/1792 (Afaf G. Eldam, *Tendency of Patients Towards Medical Treatment and Traditional Healing in Sudan* (Oldenburg: PhD Dissertation, Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, Germany, 2003), 39; online at http://oops.uni-oldenburg.de/volltexte/2004/203/pdf/eldten03.pdf). Websites accessed 2 August, 2010.

al-qādir (The Omnipotent). Colloquially, the seven letters are sometimes known as *al-amlāk al-sabʿā* (the Seven Properties).[57]

al-Bashīr's seven quotations, with each of the catchwords provided in Arabic, translate as follows.[58] ف , Sura 42:9, "God (فالله) alone is the Guardian. He resurrects the dead, and has power over all things." ق , Sura 3:26, "Say (قل), "Lord, Sovereign of all sovereignty, You bestow sovereignty on whom You will, and take it away from whom You please. You exalt whomever You will, and abase whomever You please. In Your hand lies all that is good; You have power over all things."" ج , Sura 35:1, "…renderer (جاعل) [of the earth].[59] He sends forth angels as his messengers with two, three, or four pairs of wings. He multiplies His creatures according to His will. God has power over all things." م , Sura 2:20, "[when lightning flashes on the unbelievers] they walk (مشواْ) on, but as soon as it darkens, they stand still. Indeed, if God pleased, He could take away their hearing and their sight: God has power over all things." خ , Sura 5:119-120, "[in well-watered gardens] they shall forever dwell (خالدين). God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. That is the supreme triumph. God has sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. He has power over all things." م , Sura 2:106, "If (ما) We abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We will replace it by a better one or one similar. Did you not know that God has power over all things." ت , Sura 67:1, "Blessed (تبارك) be He who in his hand holds all sovereignty: He has power over all things."

Each of the seven letters also begins a Sufi keyword.[60] These are فاتح (*fātiḥ*, "opener" or "conqueror"), قطب (*quṭb*, "pole," a reference to the *axis mundi*, and a term

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[57] Online at http://www.alchamel.org/vb/showthread.php?t=18244, accessed 3 July 2010.

[58] In this case, the Dawood translation is more helpful and has been provided. *The Koran*, trans. N.J. Dawood, (London: Penguin, 2006).

[59] A literal translation of al-Bashīr's quotation begins "renderer. He sends forth… ;" the opening word (the catchword) actually completes an omitted phrase which translates properly as "Creator of the heavens and the earth."

[60] Although the keyword list is attributed (along with the *al-qādirat* references) to al-Bashīr's book by numerous commentators, my copy of his *Sirr al-ʾAsrār* does not contain it. For a more likely origin, see note 62. For examples of their attribution to al-Bashīr, see online at

applied as an honorific to the highest of Sufi sages),[61] جامع (*jāmʿ*, *jāmiʿ*; "gathering" or "mosque"), محمدي (*muḥammadī*, "Muḥammad-ian"), خاتم (*khātam*, "seal"), مهدي (Mahdī, the future redeemer of Islam in the end-times, and closely associated with the Twelfth Imam), تجاني (Tijānī, the name of a prominent eighteenth-century CE Sufi).[62]

Strong, Severe

The letters ق و ي ش د ي د (Fig. 6) are in fact the component letters of two words, قوي (*qawī*, "strong") and شديد (*shadīd*, "severe"). Both feature in Ibn Māja's list of the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names."[63] The phrase قوي شديد occurs in Sura 8:52, in respect of

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http://mohtawa.org/index.php/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B4:%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9 and http://www.koootmail.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-3645.html, accessed 3 July, 2010.

[61] E.g. Corbin, *In Iranian Islam*, vol 2, 43-51.

[62] The final word is the last name of Sheikh Sīdī ʾAbū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Tijānī, a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad born in Algeria ca. 1149/1736, just a few years before al-Bashīr. All of the "Sufi keywords" (recapitulated here by the black text within the curled brackets) appear to have an association with this sage, who founded the Tijāniyya Sufi order. In a vision, Muḥammad declared al-Tijānī {التجاني} to be the Concealed Pole, *al-quṭb al-maktūm* {القطب المكتوم} (http://www.sheikhjamiu.com/tijani.htm). "According to Sufi tradition … there exist two other greater [categories of] saints: there are the "Seal of Mohammedian Sainthood" and the "Seal of Prophetic Inheritance," represented in Sheikh Tijānī and Imam al-Mahdī {المهدي}, respectively" (http://www.dar-sirr.com/Tijanism/khatmiya.html). Accordingly, al-Tijānī is often glossed as the "Muḥammadian seal" {الخاتم المحمدي} (e.g., http://ayoub2008.yoo7.com/montada-f1/topic-t96.htm). al-Tijānī especially promoted the benefits of the "Prayer of the Opener," *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* (صلاة الفاتح), a prayer on the Prophet that was revealed on a sheet of light to Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 952/1545) during a retreat inside the Kaʿba (http://tijani.org/the-controversy-surrounding-the-prayer-on-the-prophet-salat-al-fatih/). The first precept of Tijānī Sufism is praying in the mosque {جامع} with the congregation whenever possible (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_al-Tijani). All websites accessed 16 July, 2010. For an overview of al-Tijānī and his work, see Zachary V. Wright, *On the Path of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and the Tariqa Muhammadiyya* (Atlanta: African American Islamic Institute, 2005), 24-77.

[63] Edmond Doutté, *Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Geuthner, 1984), 201. *Shadīd* is often absent from other versions of the list.

God's punishment for disbelief: "(Their way is) as the way of Pharaoh's folk and those before them; they disbelieved the revelations of Allāh, and Allāh took them in their sins. Lo! Allāh is strong, severe in punishment." It recurs in Sura 40:22 "…their messengers kept bringing them clear proofs (of Allāh's Sovereignty) but they disbelieved; so Allāh seized them. Lo! He is strong, severe in punishment." [64]

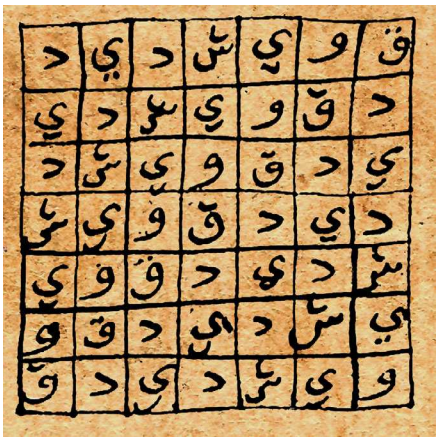

Fig. 6. A 7 x 7 Latin square comprised of the letters of "strong, severe." From the same manuscript as Fig. 5b.

The *ṭahaṭīl* Names

The seven *ṭahaṭīl* (طهطيل) names, each of seven letters, are "a mystery from the mysteries of God, [with] potency over the angels and jinn, who can't resist them ever."[65] In order, the names are ل ي ط ه ط ل ل (*lelṭahṭīl*), ل ي ط ه ط ه م (*mahṭahṭīl*), ل ي ط ي ط ه ق (*qahṭīṭīl*), ل ي ط ب ط ه ف (*fahṭobṭīl*), ل ي ط ط ه ه ن (*nahahṭaṭīl*), ل ي ط ط ه ل ج (*jahlaṭaṭīl*), and ل ي ط ط ه خ ل (*lakhaṭaṭīl*), while their acronym provides an eighth name, ل ج ن ف ق م ل (*lamaqfanjal*). [66] Sometimes *fahṭīṭīl* or *fahṭahṭīl* are given

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[64] Both translations from Mohammed M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1938).

[65] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 47

[66] An early discussion of the *ṭahaṭīl* names in English occurs in Stevenson, "Some Specimens of Moslem Charms," 102-3; he cites their (corrupted) appearance in Doutté, *Magie et Religion,* 139.

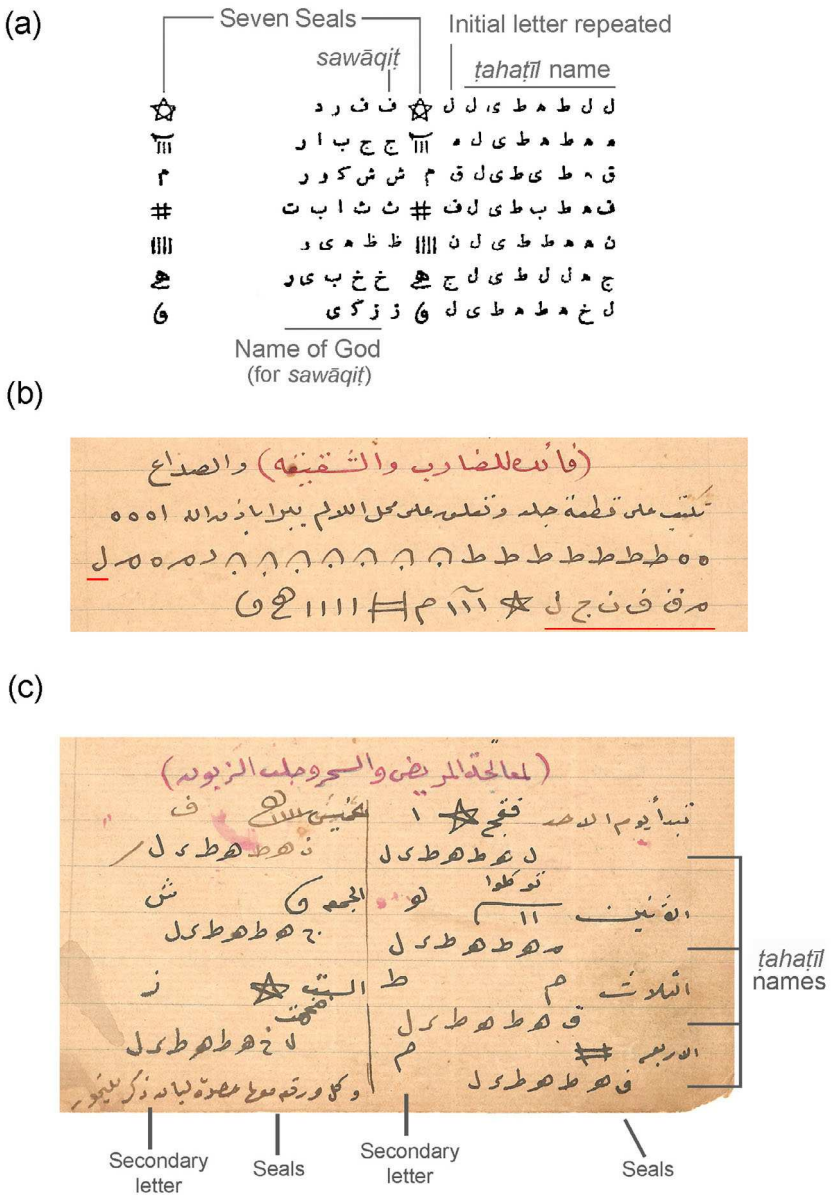

Fig. 7. The *ṭahaṭīl* names or their acronym, accompanied by the Seven Seals. **(a)** The fourth occurrence of the names in al-Būnī's *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma*. Each name is mapped to a Seal and to one of the seven *sawāqiṭ*, with its associated "Beautiful Name of God" (see Fig. 4). **(b)** The acronym *lamaqfanjal* in a *ca.* 1349/1930 manuscript copy of what is believed to be the *Mujarrabāt* of Sheikh ʿAbd al-Sattār al-Damanhūrī, composed in Egypt *ca.* 1271/1855. The acronym (underlined in red for this figure) is preceded by multiple repeats of the letters *hāʾ*, *ṭāʾ* and other characters, and followed immediately by the Seven Seals. **(c)** The *ṭahaṭīl* names in full, mapped to the Seven Seals and also to a set of subsidiary letters. The fifth and sixth Seals have become fused into a single element (which thereafter causes a non-standard *ṭahaṭīl*-Seal correspondence), and the first and last letters of the subsidiary letter series have been swapped (see text). From the same manuscript as panel b.

in place of *fahṭobṭīl*, but the latter is more common[67] (Fig. 7a,b). The acronym *lamaqfanjal* is exemplified in Fig. 7b.

The high frequency of the letters *ṭāʾ* (ط) and *hāʾ* (ه) in the names is what gives the series the name *ṭahaṭīl*.[68] Although the names themselves are not of Qurʾānic origin, one must wonder if there is not a connection between their collective name and the title of Sura 20, which is traditionally known as *Sura Ṭāʾ-Hāʾ*. The sura bears this title because it starts with those two *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters (see above), and this in turn may reflect the high frequency of those letters in its text.[69] Moreover, *Sura Ṭāʾ-Hāʾ* contains many references to magic and sorcery; for example, Moses' rod transforms into a snake, and the deceitful magic of Pharaoh's sorcerers (in which their ropes and staffs appear to come alive like snakes) is confounded by Moses' and Aaron's divinely-mandated magic, which again involves Moses' rod (Sura 20:56-70; 26:45; 7:117).[70] While linguists usually view the Arabic letter *ṭāʾ* (ط), and its Hebrew cognate *teth* (ט), as deriving from a Phoenician or paleo-Hebrew symbol (⊗) depicting a wheel or a clay/wicker container,[71] the Kabbalistic signification of *teth* is "snake."[72] This, together with the fact that all of the suras that

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[67] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 239; Nineveh Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, 112. The resemblance of this name to Fetahil, the Demiurge of the Mandaean *Codex Nazareus*, appears to be a coincidence.

[68] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 47 and 238-9. The most frequent Arabic letters in the *ṭahaṭīl* names are *ṭāʾ*, *lām*, *hāʾ* and *yāʾ*; using *ṭāʾ* (the most frequent letter) twice enables the series *ṭāʾ*, *hāʾ*, *ṭāʾ*, *yāʾ* and *lām*, or *ṭahaṭīl*.

[69] Razieh Eslamieh, "A Comparative Analysis of Miracle, Magic and Sorcery According to Koran." Islamic Azad University, Parand Branch, 2010. Online at http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/elsamipaper.pdf, accessed 24 July, 2010.

[70] In the Jewish/Biblical version the second rod belonged to Moses' brother, Aaron (Exodus 7:12), but Islamic tradition conflates the two and is solely concerned with the rod of Moses. See A. Fodor, "The Rod of Moses in Arabic Magic," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, (Aldershot UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 103-23.

[71] E.g., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenician_alphabet and http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/3_thet.html (accessed 2 April, 2011).

[72] E.g., Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah – the Book of Creation in Theory and Practice* (San Francisco: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1997), 8. The same identification was picked up by Aleister Crowley in his *Liber 777* (Table I, Column II) [e.g., *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley*, ed. Israel Regardie (York Beach, Maine: Weiser, 1982)], and consequently has become firmly entrenched in New Age

have *ṭāʾ* as a *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letter mention the story of Moses and snakes, prompted the Qurʾānic scholar Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (d. 1439/1930) to propose that *ṭāʾ* and *teth* originally denoted a serpent. The same interpretation was publicised by his student Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī in his influential Urdu exegesis of the Qurʾān.[73]

While Canaan does not mention the *ṭahaṭīl* names in his article, al-Būnī gives them or their acronym at no less than eight places in the *Sharḥ al-Jaljalūtiyya al-Kubrā* (Commentary on the Long Jaljalūtiyya/Jaljalutiah), which forms part of his *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma* (Source of the Essentials of Wisdom).[74] Where the names are provided in full, as for example in Fig. 7a, they are mapped in their usual order to the Seven Seals in their usual order, which follows the days of the week. On one occasion, al-Būnī gives a variant correspondence in which the Seals (in an unfamiliar sequence) are mapped to *lamaq-fanjal*.[75] Both of these schemes contrast with a modern mapping of the names (in their usual order) to the planets arranged according to the "Chaldean order."[76] Back in the *Uṣūl*, al-Būnī provides a further letter-by-letter correspondence of the acronym ل ج ن ف ق م ل to a secondary letter sequence, namely ذ ش ف م ط ه ا.[77] While the significance of the subsidiary letters is unclear, the assignments recur in recent manuscripts such as Fig. 7c.

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occultism. See, for example, http://www.thelemapedia.org/index.php/Hebrew_Alphabet, and Paul Dunne, "The Serpent and Teth," *The Inner Light* 23 Issue 2 (2003), http://www.innerlight.org.uk/journals/Vol23No2/serpent.htm. Websites accessed 2 April, 2011.

[73] Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-e-Qurʾān* (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 2004), 82-85; Shehzad Saleem, "*Huruf i Muqattaʿat*: Farahi's View," online at http://www.amin-ahsan-islahi.com/?=65 (accessed 2 April, 2011).

[74] al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma* (Cairo: al-Qāhira Bookshop, as-Ṣanādiqīya St., near al-Azhar) 174, 177, 179, 181, 254, 256, 259 & 264. This is the same edition as that cited by Fodor (2004), and probably the Cairo 1951 printing by Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī [Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 198]. Two of the four books in the *Uṣūl* treat the great oral invocations of Islamic magic, namely the *barhatiya* oath (also known as the Ancient Oath or Red Sulfur; see notes 90-91) and the *jaljalūtiyya* conjuration.

[75] al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, 177. See also note 77.

[76] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 239

[77] al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, p.177, reproduced by Dorothee A.M. Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1995), p.52. The letter sets are correctly aligned with each other, but the Seal sequence in the alignment is corrupt (it reads left-to-right, and also has the third and fifth Seals swapped).

Details of the ways in which the eight names are put to magical use (healing, protection, controlling others, returning an absentee, etc.)[78] are reminiscent – both in terms of intent and execution – of those given in medieval sources for use of the Seven Seals and for use of the names of power from the rod of Moses. For example, the acronym *lamaqfanjal* is to be written with musk, saffron and rose-water to protect one during a meeting with a feared person,[79] while the same mixture is specified for writing the Seven Seals in talismans whose aims include respect amongst people.[80] Similarly, a parchment inscribed with names from Moses' rod using an ink containing rose-water, saffron and extracts of aromatic plants can be used to protect its owner in dreadful places infested by robbers or dangerous animals.[81] Writing the *ṭahaṭīl* names or drawing the Seven Seals on a paper which is hung in the wind will return an absentee,[82] while using the names from Moses' rod in this way will return a stolen object or escapee.[83] Reconciliation between enemies is facilitated by eating the *ṭahaṭīl* names or drinking the Seven Seals,[84] while rainwater that has dissolved the names that featured on Moses' rod will cause the demise of a tyrant when sprayed on the walls of his house.[85] The mnemonic *lamaqfanjal* is used (often alongside the Seven Seals) in healing talismans in al-Būnī's *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma*, including a popular one called the "Pleiades Square."[86]

The first and seventh *ṭahaṭīl* names, as well as the acronym *lamaqfanjal*, are considered to share the quality of the great secret Name of God because each of them

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[78] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 47 and 240-41. Additional uses are described by Kornelius Hentschel, *Geister, Magier und Muslime* (Düsseldorf: Diederichs, 1997), 190-3.

[79] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 240.

[80] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, 101.

[81] Fodor, "The Rod of Moses," 108-9.

[82] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 240; Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, 100.

[83] Fodor, "The Rod of Moses," 109.

[84] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 240; Imâm-i Gazâlî, *Celcelûtiye Duasi: Havâs ve Esrâri* (Istanbul: Pamuk Yayincilik, 2009), 13.

[85] Fodor, "The Rod of Moses," 109.

[86] al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, e.g. 181, 232 & 263. These talismans (which include the Pleiades Square) were combined, republished and explained in recent times by Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, 110.

begins and ends with the same letter.[87] From al-Būnī we might suspect that the *ṭahaṭīl* names – like the Divine names given in the *jaljalūtiyya* – are *asmā' suryāniyya*, "names from the Sūryānī."[88] While a true Syriac (i.e., Aramaic) origin for the names seems unlikely, it is interesting to note that *ṭahaṭīl* is essentially[89] an anagram of the third of the *barhatīya*[90] (Berhatiah) names, *tatliyah*, for which Canaan offers a Syriac translation.[91] In the same vein, the use of the *ṭahaṭīl* names as a fertility aid is linked to the fifth of the *barhatiya* names, *mazjal*,[92] whose partner *bazjal* is a Syriac term.[93] Even if these connections are nothing more than coincidence, the etymological comment remains valid insofar as "Sūryānī," in its broadest sense, can serve as a catch-all for the high-sounding

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[87] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 239.

[88] John D. Martin III, *Theurgy in the Medieval Islamic World: Conceptions of Cosmology in al-Būnī's Doctrine of the Divine Names* (Cairo: MA Dissertation, American Univ. in Cairo, 2011), 75.

[89] The sound *ṭ* is replaced with *t*, but we have seen above (with the Name of the Mysteries) that phonetically close letter substitutions are not uncommon.

[90] This transliteration is so much more prevalent than *barhatiyya* that I have elected to use it.

[91] Canaan, "Decipherment," 149. Canaan has تقلية (*taqliya*) in place of the more usual تتليه (*tatliyah*) so he transliterates the name as "*taklieh*," which in Syiac means "the Heaved." It is therefore unclear whether *tatliyah* really does have a Syriac meaning. Arabic commentators tend to gloss this *barhatiya* name as "God who answers all things" (Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 49), or "the Powerfully Holy," "the Well-Informed," or "the Protector from Oppression" (al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, translated by Wahid Azal in "The Birhatîya Conjuration Oath and the Meaning of its First 28 Names," in *Third Annual Conference: Alternative Expressions of the Numinous* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2008); paper online at http://sites.google.com/site/ruhaniya/Birhatiya4.9.pdf, accessed 8 August, 2010). See note 74 for a general comment on the *barhatiya* oath.

[92] Ahmed al-Buni, *Berhatiah: Ancient Magick Conjuration of Power*, ed. Nineveh Shadrach (Vancouver: Ishtar, 2012), 114. The formula to aid women who are having difficulty becoming pregnant involves writing *mazjal* in a bowl seven times along with the seven *ṭahaṭīl* names and their acronym, *lamaqfanjal*, and dissolving them off in water. The client drinks such a solution seven times over seven days at the appropriate stage in her menstrual cycle.

[93] Canaan, "Decipherment," 149. The word *bazjal* is Syriac for "the Affectionate," while Arabic commentators tend to gloss the name as "the Beloved One," "the Giver of Peace" (Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 49), or "the Desired One" or "the Primary" (al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, trans. by Azal in "The Birhatîya Conjuration Oath"). The word *mazjal* is glossed as "the Ever-Believing" (Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 49), or "the Peerless," "the Self-Subsistent," or "the Ariser" (al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, trans. by Azal in "The Birhatîya Conjuration Oath").

but meaningless words interpolated into Arabic by mystics and magicians.[94] It is possible that the *ṭahaṭīl* names have in fact been constructed artificially by *abjad* numerology and/or systematic letter permutations;[95] indeed, a modern grimoire shows how a further twenty-seven names can be extracted from each of the originals by Latin-square permutations of their letters.[96]

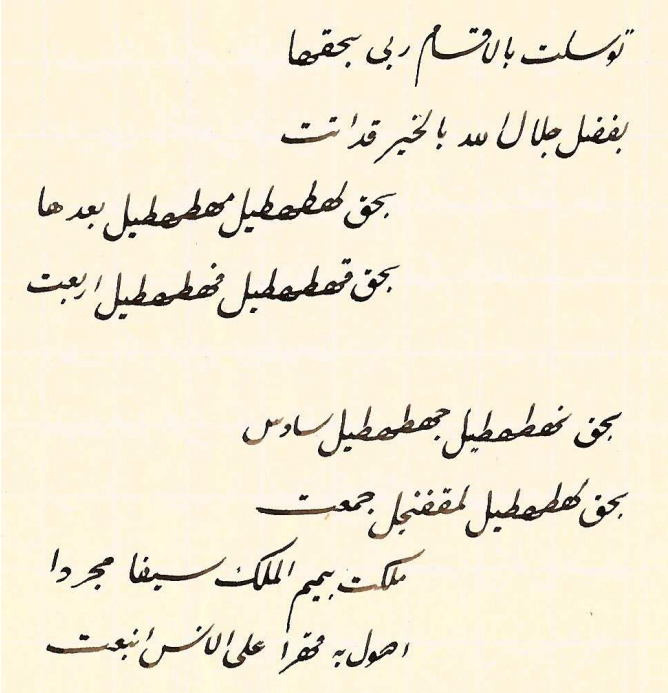

Fig. 8. The *tahaṭīl* names and their acronym (all in connected script) in a 113-couplet version of the *jaljalūtiyya* conjuration. This extract shows couplets 62-65, the middle two of which are dominated by the names. From an Ottoman Turkish Sufi journal (*ca*. 1307/1890) containing many versions of the *jaljalūtiyya*, most of which do not contain the *ṭahaṭīl* names. They are also absent from the short and long versions given in al-Būnī's *Uṣūl*.

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[94] Ignaz Goldziher, "Linguistisches aus der Literatur der Muhammedanischen Mystik," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Joseph DeSomogyi, vol. I (Hildesheim, Germany: Olms, 1967), 165-86, at 166.

[95] E.g. Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 153-161. A poem enumerates the individual letters of the *ṭahaṭīl* names in the *Uṣūl* and declares their secret to be 49, the total number of letters; see al-Buni, *Berhatiah: Ancient Magick Conjuration of Power*, 191-2.

[96] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 241-2.

A legend attributed to "Abu Bakir al-Turyzi"[97] tells that the *ṭahaṭīl* names were found preserved on a tablet of seven metals in a white marble chest in the belongings of ʾAbū al-Qāsim Maslama bin Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (born in Cordoba in 293/906, and the probable author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Picatrix*),[98] who in turn attributed them to a student of Handrius.[99] With them al-Qurṭubī did marvellous and strange magic. Consistent with the presence of the angelic suffix "*–il*" (ل ي –), the equivalent of the Hebrew "*–el*," there is a general trend towards viewing the *ṭahaṭīl* names as names of spirits such as kings of the jinn,[100] with *lamaqfanjal* as an eighth king ruling over the first seven.[101] The *ṭahaṭīl* names and their acronym appear in quick succession in a version of the *jaljalūtiyya* (Fig. 8). Another conjuration, which exists in versions ranging from the expansive (as found in al-Būnī's *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma*)[102] to the minimal, lauds "all the mighty of the daunting jinn, and the committed *ṭahaṭīl* servants of obedience," invoking them in the following terms:[103]

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[97] This name is not properly transliterated, but unfortunately I am unable to get back to the original Arabic. Of the possibilities for proper transliterations, only one relates to a known individual who is potentially from the right era: ʾAbū Bakr al-Ṭarāzī (pre-426/1035); obscure, but probably a Persian from Nishapur [Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical* tafsīr *Tradition: the Qurʾān Commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden:Brill, 2004), 33]. If one allows for some corruption in the name, then two more likely possibilities arise: ʾAbū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn al-Tūrīzī, one of the authorities claimed by al-Būnī [Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 194], and the relatively famous Persian scholar and physician, ʾAbū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyā al-Rāzī (b. *ca*. 251/865), known to the West as Rhazes or Rasis [e.g., http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/islamic_medical/islamic_06.html, accessed 12 Feb, 2011].

[98] Maribel Fierro, "Bātinism in al-Andalus. Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*)," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996), 87-112.

[99] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 47.

[100] For example, see online at http://castle.elmokhtaar.com/t5394/; accessed 3 August, 2010.

[101] For example, see online at http://www.alchamel.org/vb/showthread.php?t=7215; accessed 3 August, 2010.

[102] al-Būnī, *Uṣūl*, 259.

[103] Translated from the long form (note 102 and http://www.cherif26.co.cc/montada-f6/topic-t225.htm), with reference to the mid-length form (http://www.asselaimani.org/vb/t489.html) and short form (http://www.forum-religion.org/islamo-chretien/sorcellerie-noms-de-dieu-t22341.html); websites accessed 16-19 July, 2010. An alternative invocation is given by Hentschel, *Geister*, 194-7.

By the rebuke of the most high *Ehieh Asher Ehieh* [104]
And the shining light of *Adonai Sabaoth* [105]
To attract the *ṭahaṭīl* servants I am calling
By the light and joy of *El Shaddai* [106]
Accept the charge and be brought to this place
Reply, O Mudhib; to duty, Murra!
Obligation, O Aḥmar, Barqān and Shamhūrish
Come Zūbaʿa, and be present, Mīmūn[107]
All of you to serve [my] intent and desire
By the light of *leḷṭahṭīl*, I hope for your presence
By the secret of *mahṭahṭīl*, clearly illumined
By the honor of *qahṭīṭīl*, like a shooting star
By the force of *fahṭobṭīl*, I start calling
By the light of *nahahṭaṭīl*, fulfill my needs
Then by the high secret of *jahlaṭaṭīl*
And by *lakhaṭaṭīl*, hurry to this assembly,
By right of *lamaqfanjal*, that high secret
Accept all, and do what I demand of you
Answer the *ṭahaṭīl* command!

It is likely that the use of the qualities of the *ṭahaṭīl* names to summon the well-known seven kings of the jinn (Mudhib, Aḥmar, Barqān, etc.) has led to the assumption that the *ṭahaṭīl* and jinn kings are similar entities. Nevertheless, there remains an appreciation that the *ṭahaṭīl* names function more as titles than as personal appellations, in that – over time – each *ṭahaṭīl* is believed to be embodied by a succession of different spirits.[108] The recurring connection between the *ṭahaṭīl* names and the Seven Seals (e.g., Fig. 7a-c) is reinforced by a legend in which an engraving of the latter on the walls of

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[104] Hebrew for "I Am Who I Am," Exodus 3:14, transliterated into Arabic in the poem.

[105] Hebrew for "Lord of Hosts," transliterated into Arabic in the poem.

[106] Hebrew for "God Almighty," transliterated into Arabic in the poem.

[107] The jinn kings are listed in the order of the day over which each presides, starting with Sunday (Mudhib) and ending with Saturday (Mīmūn). Canaan, "Decipherment," 171.

[108] Online at http://www.alchamel.org/vb/showthread.php?t=7215; accessed 18 July, 2010.

Solomon's temple in Jerusalem was said to be protected by seven demons from the spirit-world called *ṭahaṭīl*.[109] Some members of the Malaysian academy *Maqari Syifa' Qurani* carry the demonic identification to an extreme, claiming that sorcerers have managed to pass off the *ṭahaṭīl* demons as angels; they assert that the archangel Ruqiel is actually the demon *lelṭahṭīl*, Gabriel is really *mahṭahṭīl*, Semsamiel is *qahṭīṭīl*, Michael is *fahṭahṭīl*, and so on.[110]

Concluding remarks

Our survey of "privileged letter series" commenced with the nineteen-letter *basmalla* and then addressed the fourteen Letters of Light, including the full-length Name of the Mysteries and two five-letter "crowning words" from the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letter-sequences of the Qurʾān. It moved on to the seven letters of the lower darkness, the *sawāqiṭ*. Subsequently, we examined the seven Letters of Bahteh from the *al-qādirat* and the seven component letters of the Qurʾānic phrase "strong, severe." Finally, we reviewed the seven-letter strings that comprise the seven *ṭahaṭīl* names, and the eighth name that is their acronym.

Many of the letter series presented in this paper feature in the work of al-Būnī, who regarded Islamic magic as legitimate and even praiseworthy. With Muslim attitudes towards all forms of magic soured by suspicions that it invoked powers other than God, as found in pre-Islamic or foreign sorcery,[111] al-Būnī "sought in every way possible to

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[109] Contribution from an Algerian Muslim, online at http://www.forum-religion.org/islamo-chretien/sorcellerie-noms-de-dieu-t22341.html; accessed 18 July, 2010.

[110] Online at http://syeikhulmaqari.blogspot.com/2010/04/seorang-mualij-jangan-tertipu-kadang.html; accessed 28 July, 2010. Presumably the idea of evil spirits impersonating angels takes its cue from the presence of the angelic suffix in the *ṭahaṭīl* and other demonic names, a conflict which evaporates if one views demons as fallen angels. A comparable bout of suspicion saw Doutté allege that many of the supposed Syriac "Divine names" in the *jaljalūtiyya* are in fact demonic invocations masquerading as pious supplications to God. Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, 141-42.

[111] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, 56-71.

produce magical practices that were grounded in the Qurʾān, the Divine Names, the letters making up this or that Koranic verse, etc."[112] With the significance of those letters amplified by the use of disconnected writing, the resulting paradigm has remained prominent in the books and talismans of Islamic magic from the thirteenth century CE through to the present day.

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Cite as: Lloyd D. Graham (2011) "Qur'anic Spell-ing: Disconnected Letter Series in Islamic Talismans," online at http://www.academia.edu/516626/Qur_anic_Spell-ing_Disconnected_Letter_Series_in_Islamic_Talismans.

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[112] Pierre Lory, "Kâshifî's *Asrâr-i Qâsimî* and Timurid magic," *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003), 531-41.